

The Basics of Knives and Cutting Techniques

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Why Are Good Knife Skills So Important?

Uniform cooking times.

Large pieces of vegetables take longer to cook than smaller ones. So if you're sautéing carrots that are cut to different sizes and shapes, you'll either overcook the smaller pieces by the time the bigger ones are done, or you'll cook the smaller pieces properly but leave the bigger ones undercooked.

Consistent cutting technique ensures your food is cooked to a uniform degree of doneness.

Enhanced visual appeal.

It's the *art* part of the culinary arts. Sloppy knife work makes for a sloppy-looking dish. Skilled knife work indicates a cook who takes pride in their work and doesn't take shortcuts. It's a way of paying a compliment to whoever you're serving the dish to — saying to them, "You're worth it!"

Tips and Warnings

If your cutting board tends to slide while you are chopping, place a damp towel underneath the board to keep it in place.

Use a knife that you are accustomed to. Practice on soft foods like cheese, melon or bread and get a feel for how the knife works before you try chopping harder foods like onions or potatoes. Take it easy at first.

Be sure to use a sharpened knife. Dull knives will not only make chopping more difficult, but can easily slip and cause injuries.

The Anatomy of a Chef's Knife



The chef's knife is probably a cook's most important tool. And given the amount of time it spends in your hand, it's definitely worth making sure you have a good one. A quality knife is forged from a single piece of steel that runs the length of the knife.

Chef's Knife Blade. The best chef's knives are made of high-carbon stainless steel, which is a very hard metal that keeps its edge for a long time and won't discolor or rust like ordinary carbon steel. Chef's knives are measured in inches, and lengths of 8" to 12" are common.

Chef's Knife Handle. Unless you're very unlucky, the part of a chef's knife you'll have the most contact with is the handle. So you'll want to make sure it's comfortable and fits your hand. It shouldn't feel slippery or cause you to have to grip excessively hard.



Chef's Knife Heel. The heel is the widest part of the knife, located at the rear of the blade where it meets the handle. This section of the cutting edge is used for chopping hard items like carrots, nuts or even chicken bones.

Chef's Knife Tang. The best knives are forged from a single piece of steel that runs all the way into the handle. The section of steel inside the handle is called the *tang*. A "full tang" provides strength and better balance.

Chef's Knife Bolster. The bolster is the thick shoulder of heavy steel located at the front of the handle where it meets the spine, or the top (non-cutting) edge of the blade. In addition to balancing the knife, the bolster also helps keeps your fingers from slipping while you work, thus preventing hand fatigue and blisters.

How to Use A Chef's Knife

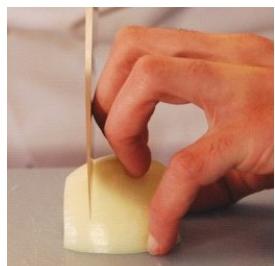


Proper Chef's Knife Grip. This photo illustrates the proper chef's knife grip as seen from the inside or thumb-side of the cutting hand. The thumb grips the knife around the top of the blade, with the hand wrapped around the bolster of the knife.



Grip Outer View. Here we see the same grip from the opposite side. Note how the index finger is wrapped fully around the blade. The index finger and thumb should be opposite each other on either side of the blade while the remaining three fingers are sort of loosely curled around the handle. Note that you should be gripping the knife mainly with the thumb and forefinger.

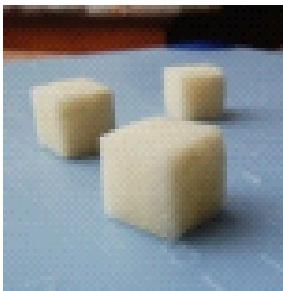
Secure the Food With the Guiding Hand. Your non-knife hand is called your "guiding hand," and its job is to hold the food to keep it from sliding around on the cutting board. The grip shown here is called the "claw grip". By keeping fingers curled inward and gripping the food with the fingernails, the fingers stay out of harm's way. The side of the knife blade actually rests against the first knuckle of the guiding hand, which helps keep the blade perpendicular to the cutting board.



Alternate Claw Grip. In this version of the claw grip, the first knuckle of the guiding hand rests flat on the food product, with the fingers again curled inward safely. And this time the knife rests against the second knuckle rather than the first.



Basic Knife Cuts Photo Examples



Dice: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{3}{4}$ inch \times $\frac{3}{4}$ inch \times $\frac{3}{4}$ inch.



Medium Dice: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{2}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{2}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{2}$ inch.



Small Dice: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{4}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{4}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.



Julienne: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{8}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{8}$ inch \times $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.



Batonnet: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{2}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{2}$ inch \times $2\frac{1}{2}$ - 3 inches.



Allumette: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{4}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{4}$ inch \times $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.



Brunoise: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{8}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{8}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{8}$ inch.



Fine Brunoise: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{16}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{16}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{16}$ inch.



Fine Julienne: A basic knife cut measuring $\frac{1}{16}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{16}$ inch \times 2 inches.

Pronunciation:
bah-tow-NAY

Pronunciation:
al-yoo-MET

Pronunciation:
BROON-wah

Pronunciation:
(fine) BROON-wah

Pronunciation:
(fine) joo-lee-ENN